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Preface

The Altar of Innocence is a book about claiming your voice. The poems in this volume, based on events in my life, explore the 60s' culture of secrecy surrounding alcoholism and depression and their effects on the young girl who witnessed the roller-coaster ride of mental illness and self-medication. In writing these poems, I spent time analyzing my parents' unspoken lessons—about communication, conflict, and managing illness—and how those lessons unfolded in my own marriage. I explore these issues through three lenses: conjectures about what my mother might have felt, recollections of key events in my childhood and adolescence, and my own journey to overcome depression, heal from chronic migraines, and finally leave a destructive marriage.

By mining the daily journal I kept during the four years of my depression, I was able to select key events to illustrate my story, as well as the records of medications, conversations, and feelings that I had during that time.

I offer my story as a glimpse into the secret worlds that so many still inhabit today. We are never as alone as we think.

Ann Bracken
October, 2014

The Altar of Innocence

Dad is on the phone again
talking to someone
about pressing decisions, uncertain returns.

Grandma, full-busted and corseted,
bustles in the front door
tacitly assumes command of the household.

She lifts the whimpering infant from the bassinette
and wraps her in solid, fleshy arms.
Rocking side to side, she quiets the baby's cries, soothes her hunger
with a bottle of warm formula. Urgently

Dad ushers Grandma into the kitchen
and closes the door.
Huddled and silent, the trio of kids
hears the familiar bolt of the lock.

Straining at the door for a clue,
they catch vague promises
that their mother will be all right.

The children keep a silent vigil
and place their unasked questions
on the altar of their innocence.